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*The Scripture Prophecies consider'd —  
and compar'd with the Oracles of the  
Heathens.*

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A  
S E R M O N

Preached before the  
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,

At St. MARY's,

On Sunday, Aug. 2. 1761.

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## R E V. XIX. 10.

*For the Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit  
of Prophecy.*

**T**HERE cannot be a more agreeable Exercise of the Mind of Man, than to look back upon the various Administrations of divine Providence in the several Ages of the World. A Desire of Knowledge is interwoven in our Constitution, and as long as this Principle remains within Us, the Entertainments of *History* will always be pleasing and delightful.

Hereby We are led, as by a *Clue*, through the dark *Mazes* of Antiquity, and are enabled to trace the different Modes and Customs of past Ages from the first Dawning of Science to the present Period of Things.

But if We set before Us that vast and comprehensive System, which the *Prophecies* contain'd in the Scriptures, exhibit to Us; here We take in a larger Compass; the most *unbounded* Prospect opens to our View; not only the various Successions and Revolutions of

A

past

past Events, but the future Contingencies of Things (where the human Eye cannot penetrate) are by a divine *Perspective*, presented clearly to our Imaginations. It is *the Spirit of Prophecy*, that declares the End from the Beginning, and from antient Times, the Things, that are not yet done. <sup>a</sup>

Each Prediction, though detach'd from, and independent on all others, is pregnant with some important Truth; but if We consider the whole *Series* of Them, harmoniously conspiring in one *grand Design*, and pointing out the Rise and Progress of Religion and Government, from the first Infancy of the World, to the final Consummation of all Things, what an *amazing Plan* of the divine Wisdom and Goodness is here offer'd and display'd to Us?

The Prophetic Visions were so far from being confin'd to one determinate Circumstance of Time or Place, that They often adjust together, as in one *exquisite Piece*, a great Variety of *Images* representing the State and Condition of the Christian Church in different and distant Ages.

Thus in the Chapter, from which the Words of the Text are taken, St. *John* throws together in one collective View a long Train

<sup>a</sup> Isai. xlv. 10.



of Events, which are set forth to Us under several Distinct *Emblems*, and were to follow each other, after a long intermediate Space.

The former Period is describ'd as dark and gloomy, under the Character of *the great Whore, corrupting the Earth with her Fornication, and her Smoke rose up for ever and ever,*<sup>a</sup> intimating, that this *prostitute and idolatrous City*, would justly provoke the *Vengeance* of the Almighty; and for these *true and righteous Judgments of God*, all are excited to join in Praises, and *Thanksgivings*; which is agreeable to the Angel's Exhortation in the former Chapter, *Rejoyce over Her, Thou Heaven, and Ye holy Apostles and Prophets; for God has avenged You on Her.*<sup>b</sup>

After this Destruction of the Seat of Idolatry, God is highly celebrated for restoring the *Church* to Purity and Splendor. *She*<sup>c</sup> is now prefigur'd under that beautiful *Symbol*, as the *Spouse of Christ, array'd in fine Linnen, clean and white: For the fine Linnen is the Righteousness of Saints.*<sup>d</sup>

What can be a more glorious *Prospect*? *Blessed are They, which are called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.* These are em-

a Rev. xix. 2, 3.

b Ibid. xviii. 20.

c Ibid.

d Ibid. xix. 8.

phatically styl'd the *true Sayings of God*,<sup>a</sup> and They overwhelm'd the Prophet with Such Rapture and Amazement, that *He fell down at the Angel's Feet to worship Him.*

But how was the *Angel* mov'd, when He beheld this mistaken Act of Devotion? *See, Thou do it not*, says He, but *worship God*,<sup>b</sup> the only true Object of Adoration, and He mingles with His rebuke this tender and affecting Consideration, that They both acted under the same Commission, were both of *Them Fellow-Servants and Prophets of God, bearing the same Testimony—For the Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy.*<sup>c</sup>

In order therefore to shew the Force of the Evidence arising from the *Scripture-Prophecies*, I shall consider Them in several respective Lights, and point out the most illustrious Marks of Truth, which they carry in them; in the Course of which Inquiry, the distinguished Excellence of the divine Oracles will appear above all the Oracular Predictions of the *Heathens*.

The *first* Thing, which calls for our Attention, is the *early Institution* of the *Scripture-Prophecies*. Such is their genuine *Antiquity*, that They date their *Origin* from the *Fall of Man*.

a Rev. xix. 9.

b Ibid. 10.

c Ibid.

When

When the Purity and Perfection of human Nature was defac'd by the Transgression of our *first Parents*, it pleas'd God not to *leave Himself without Witness*, nor to permit his Creatures, *tho' fallen*, to languish under their *Burthen*; but as in the *natural*, so in the *moral* World, He *commanded Light to spring out of Darknefs*. In this critical Season of Distress, He usher'd in that solemn and *gracious Promise*, that *the Seed of the Woman should bruise the Serpent's Head*.<sup>a</sup>

This, (if I may so call it) was the *chief Corner-Stone*, upon which the *whole Scheme of Prophecy* was *founded*, and It rose agreeably to this *Plan* in the several *Progressive Periods* of the World.

The Scene open'd gradually: *New Covenants* were granted; and the Rights and Liberties of the original *Charter* were renew'd and confirm'd.

In the *Patriarchal Age*, as Prophecies abounded more and more, so the Mercies of God were multiply'd, and the Lines of Man's *Redemption* were mark'd out in stronger Characters.

The several Revelations granted to *Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, and indeed every

<sup>a</sup> Gen. iii. 15.

Method of Prophecy in the Succeeding Ages, whether by *Urim* and *Tbummim*, by a *Voice from Heaven*, by *Dreams*, *Types*, or *Visions*, as They could be instituted by no other, than the *divine Wisdom*, so They were truly worthy of His Interposal; They all carry in them, the most awful and striking Circumstances, are adapted to the *Genius* of the *Jewish* People, are visible Memorials of divine Providence, and *declarative* of the *Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*.

These Methods of foretelling future Events in the early Ages of the World, were absolutely necessary to check the *Abominations* of the Heathens, which *the Law of Moses* expressly *forbids*,<sup>a</sup> and to prevent the Minds of the *Jews* from being drawn aside by the Enchantments of *Pagan* Oracles. Without these Restraints, as *Origen* observes, the *Jews* might have been too apt to apostatize from the Religion of their Fathers.<sup>b</sup>

But notwithstanding the Antiquity of the Scripture-Predictions, though their first Commencement was almost as old as the Creation, yet Some *Unbelievers* have taken great Pains to invalidate this *Testimony* of the Spirit, and

<sup>a</sup> Deut. xviii. 9, 10, 11.  
1. p. 28.

<sup>b</sup> Origen contra Celsum. Lib.

with



with an Air of Triumph peculiar to Themselves, have represented the Scripture Methods of *divining*, as but fraudulent Tricks of later Date, than those of *Paganism*, and contriv'd only as counterfeit Resemblances in Imitation of Them. The *Candidates for Prophecy* (says the Author of the *Grounds and Reasons*) *were taught the Rules of Divination practis'd by the Pagans, who were skill'd therein, and in Possession of the Art long before Them.*"

There might indeed be some Colour for this Objection, if the *Word of Prophecy* had never been heard of, till after *the Captivity*, or some later Period of *the Jewish Church*, but as It took its rise even from *Adam*, and was continu'd down in the several successive *Ages of the World*, We may venture to say, that the *Priority* in point of Time, was certainly in favour of the Scripture-Predictions, and the subsequent Oracles of the *Gentiles* may with greater Propriety be suppos'd to be mimick Attempts devis'd by the *Pagan Priests*, in Opposition to the *Jews*.

It may be difficult perhaps to ascertain precisely the first Beginning of Oracles, and of the various Arts of *Sooth-saying*, which were

a P. 89. and again p. 208.

adopted

adopted in the *Pagan Theology*.<sup>a</sup> *Cicero* tells Us, that Principles of Divination have prevail'd among all Nations, and He instances particularly in the *Assyrians, Egyptians, Cilicians, Pisidians, Pamphylians, Gracians, Romans, Etrurians* and *Others*.<sup>b</sup> But though We make this Concession, it by no means follows, that the *Scripture-Oracles* were invented in Conformity to Those of the *Gentiles*: All, that can be inferr'd from hence, is the *Universality* of *Prophetic Sentiments*. There always was an Inquisitiveness in Mankind, a fond Curiosity of diving into Futurity, and of looking into the *secret Mysteries* of *Time*.

When *Pagan Idolatry* had spread itself more and more, and *Oracles*, the strongest Barriers of It, had almost universally *captivated* the Minds of the People, It pleas'd God to widen the *Sphere of Prophecy*, as He did in the Days of *Samuel*; and perhaps the Schools of the Prophets might be instituted with this View, as a wise expedient to establish in the Minds of the *Jews* a Sense of the Great *Jehovah*,

<sup>a</sup> Vide Nicephorum de Oraculorum, five *ἱερομαντεῶν* Origine atque auctoribus. *Historiæ suæ* Lib. 5. Et Van-Dale *Differ. secundam de Oraculis* p. 209. usque ad 213.

<sup>b</sup> De Divinatione, Lib. 2.

the One Supreme and independent Ruler of the World, to crush the growing *Vanities of the Heathens*, and to triumph over their *lying Abominations* by a more eminent Display of the divine Wisdom and Power above all the pretended *Gods of the Nations*. This was a seasonable Interposition of the *Spirit of God*, and as this is a Sentiment, that does Honour to the Scriptures, so no Advantage can be drawn from hence to the Cause of Infidelity. \*

*Secondly*, Another Point of View, in which the Scripture-Prophecies ought to be consider'd, is the *Dignity and Importance* of the Subjects contained in Them: Subjects not trifling in their Manner, nor unmeaning in their End, not about idle insignificant Facts, the casual Productions of *Time* and *Chance*, but such as relate to the greatest and most distinguish'd Events of all Antiquity. The most celebrated *Cities*, the *Pride and Glory* of different Kingdoms (which had an immediate Connexion with the *Jews*) are here delineated, as in a *Map*. The Fate of *Nineveh*, *Babylon*, *Tyre* and *Ægypt*, falling from their

\* The *Learned* are much divided in their Opinions concerning some peculiar *Rites* of the *Jews*, but it ought to be consider'd, that a *Reference* to does by no means imply an *Imitation* of the Customs of the *Heathens*. See *Spencer*, *Shuckford*, &c.

Heigth and Splendor, and tumbling into Ruin and Desolation, not only corresponded with the Scripture Account, but is confirm'd in all Respects by the Testimony of both antient and modern Writers, and in such a Variety of Circumstances, as could be foretold only by *Him*, who presides over *Contingencies*, and sees through the Succession of Ages.

Nor was the Spirit of Prophecy confin'd within these Limits. Nations at a greater Distance, but in whose prosperous, or adverse Fortunes, the *Church of God* was nearly interested and concern'd, are pointed out in the minutest Manner, and the several Forms of Administration, which prevail'd among Them, (tho' hinted with Brevity) are express'd with the nicest Precision and Exactness. Here all the great Periods of the *Babylonian*, *Persian*, *Macedonian* and *Roman Governments* pass as it were in review before Us. \*

The most illustrious Personages, such as *Cyrus* <sup>b</sup> and others, who were the principal *Engines* in bringing about the Works of God,

<sup>a</sup> Under the different Emblems, of a *Lion with Eagles Wings*, a *Bear with three Ribs in the Mouth of It*; a *Leopard with four Wings*, and *four Heads*, and a *Beast with ten Horns*; which in *Nebuchadnezzar's* Vision was exhibited in the *Form of a great Image*.

<sup>b</sup> *Ezra* i. 1. *Isaiah* xlv. 28. *1 Kings* xiii. 2.



are set forth with the strongest Distinctions of Character, even some Ages, before They appear'd upon the Stage of Action, and in so clear and circumstantial a Manner, that the Prophetic *Anticipations* are real *Commentaries* of their Lives and Actions.

Of the *Jews* especially, as the peculiar *People of God*, to Whom the sacred Oracles were immediately directed, We have the Portrait in full Proportion. The *Prophecies* concerning Them are very affecting and convincing; They unfold such a Train of Events in every Crisis of their Republick, as, if rightly consider'd, cannot but give Us the most magnificent Ideas of the divine Wisdom; every Part of their Conduct is *decypher'd*, and every Turn of Fortune, which either did, or shall attend them, from their going into *Ægypt*, even to the End of the World. We read their *Dangers* and *Distresses*, their *Captivity* and *Deliverance*, their *Backslidings*, *Idolatry*, and *Dispersions*, in a great Variety of Description minutely extending even to *Time* and *Place*. While no *Enemy* was at their *Gates*, nor any visible *Power* to hurt them, Their *City* and *Temple* were loudly threatned with *Destruction*, and in due Season It came upon Them, like a *Whirlwind*, with all the foreboded Horrors, and not one

*Stone was left upon another.* It is very observable, till they had fill'd up the Measure of their Iniquities, this dreadful Scene of Desolation was suspended, and till *Shiloh* came, the Sceptre did not depart from *Judah*. The Historical Narrations of *Josephus Himself* are not more accurate and express, and in the *Prophetic Language*, there is a peculiar Boldness much more striking and lively.

But above all, the *Kingdom of the Messiah*, is, the divine Theme of all the Prophets. This, if I may so call It, is the *Eye of Prophecy*, which enlivens the whole System, looking backwards to the first *Original*, and forwards to the great Conclusion, the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the *Beginning* and the *End* of the great *Oeconomy* of Providence.

It would be too tedious to specify the several distinctive Characters of the *Messiah* drawn at large by the Prophets, concerning His *Birth*, or *Family*, His *Life* and *Offices*, His *Sufferings* or *Glory*, His *Death* or *Triumphs* over all by His *Resurrection* and *Ascension*: I shall only observe, that all this Variety of Circumstances were wonderfully fulfill'd in *Jesus* in such an exact *Coincidence*, and with such remarkable *Strokes* of Resemblance, that no Man of serious Reflection can dispute his  
Title

Title to the *Messiahship*, as being *the Star of Jacob, the Shiloh, that was to come, of the Root of Jesse, of the Tribe of Judah, the great Preacher of Truth and Righteousness, the Desire and Expectation of all Nations.*

When the *holy Seers of God* were big with these Sentiments, with what Pomp and Majesty of Expression did They proclaim the glad Tidings of Salvation? Such was the powerful Influence of the *Word of God*, that it fir'd the Imaginations of the Prophets, and kindled in their Breasts a Flame of Oratory, above the loftiest Flights of the Oriental Genius, and this heavenly Spirit was farther amplify'd, embolden'd and enforc'd by the Dignity of the Subject.

Let any Man now cast an Eye upon the most solemn Predictions of the Heathens. How mean does the *Pythian Priestess* appear in the midst of all that ridiculous Pageantry, that was cast about Her? Where is that simple unaffected Greatness, which adorn'd the Prophets of God? The Oracles of the One were trifling and phantastical, They convey'd nothing, that could be of much Utility or Importance to Mankind, and sometimes countenanc'd the grossest Vices, such as even debas'd the Dignity of human Nature: But  
Those

Those of the other were great and venerable upon all Accounts, not calculated for *Amusement* but *Edification*, and the Truths deliver'd were not of a flattering Nature, intended to humour the Passions, Prejudices, or rooted *Superstitions* of the People, but such, as declar'd the *Wisdom* of God, the *Piety* of the Prophets, the blessed Fruits of *Obedience*, and the pernicious Consequences of *Sin*.<sup>a</sup>

*Thirdly*, The *Scripture-Prophecies* come recommended to Us for that *free and ingenuous Perspicuity*, which is visible in *Them* above all the Oracles of *false Prophets*, as far as the Reason and Fitness of Things could possibly admit.

Examine into the most *celebrated Predictions* of the *Pagans*, They were generally utter'd in dark *ænigmatical* Expressions, under some *false Disguise* or *artful Evasion*, least the Event should discover their Fraud and Imposture. The *Priests* themselves were not able to explain, upon what Principles they acted, and some of the *Heathens* were so ridiculous, as to suppose, that the *Prophetic Enthusiasm*

<sup>a</sup> Τότε πὴν ἢ τὸ Ἀλάφορον ἦ ὑπὸ τῶ Θεοῦ πιδέμετος κατόχου, ἢ ἦ ὑπὸ Ἀλμυνικῆς ἐνεργείας μαυτινέας πρῶτοις ἐμδρῶν. Eusebius Demon. Evang. lib. 5. p. 209.



proceeded from *the Vapours and Exhalations of the Earth.*<sup>a</sup>

But the Scripture-Prophecies are more open and explicit, not depending upon human Arts and Contrivances, but upon the infallible Dictates of the *Spirit, which searcheth all Things, yea, the deep Things of God.*<sup>b</sup> The most material Points, which concern the *Jewish* or the *Christian Church* are drawn at large, without *Ambiguity*, and in the strongest Colours.

Let any Man read the *Prophet Isaiah*, the great *Demosthenes of the Hebrews* (as *Grotius* calls Him) He is so far from being perplex'd and intricate in his *Narrations*, that there is a beautiful *Plainness* and *Simplicity* in his *Stile*, and in the most *figurative* Part of his *Writings* the *Metaphors* and *Allusions* are, some taken from *common Life*, some from the *Jewish Ritual*, but these are such as are easy and natural, adapted with great *Propriety* to the *Subject*, and expressive of its *Design*.

And the *Book of Daniel* for the most Part is so far from being abstruse and unintelligible, that *Porphyry*<sup>c</sup> consider'd it in another View, rather as an *Historical Narrative* of past Transactions, than a *Prediction* of Things to come.

a See Plutarch de defectu Oraculorum, p. 732. b 1 Cor. ii.

c Vide Hieron. Proœmium in Dan.

There are indeed a few Passages, in which the Sense is clouded and obscur'd, under the *Covert* of particular *Symbols*. But the *Diction*, though *Emblematical*, is not out of the Reach of a fair Interpretation. The principal Events concerning the *Rise and Downfall* of the *four secular Monarchies of the World*, and the Establishment of the *fifth, or spiritual Kingdom of the Messiah*, are describ'd with such strong *Characteristical Notes*, that the main Drift, or *grand Design* cannot easily be mistaken.

Among some *Commentators* there always was, and will be a Difference of *Opinion*, but this Contrariety may be justly observ'd to proceed oftener from the different Turns of different *Systematical* Writers, than from any real *Obscurities* in the Prophets. Various Motives and Principles have induc'd Men to throw a Veil of Mystery over the *Word of Prophecy*. Some through *Indolence* and Inattention, Others, through a particular *Byass* of *Sentiment*; Many, through a Want of Knowledge in *History*, and too many, with a worse Intention, to depreciate the Truth of the sacred Oracles.

But to all such Persons, whether the *Friends* or *Enemies* of reveal'd Religion, the Answer is easy and obvious.

If

If the *Prophetic System* was totally involv'd in *Darkness*, and We had no other *Standard* of Truth, It must be own'd, that This would be an *inextricable Labyrinth* indeed.

But We have many other *Foundations* to build our Faith upon, and the *Testimony* of Prophecy is attended with every Degree of Light, which any reasonable Person can desire.

Let us look at the *Things before Us*. How hardly do *We guess aright*?<sup>a</sup> How unable are We to solve all *Difficulties* in the present *Constitution* of Things? What Absurdity therefore is it to suppose, that every *Page* in the Book of *Prophecy* should be fully open'd to our View, when there are so many intricate *Foldings* even in the *Book of Nature*?

Great Pains have been taken to *wrest the Scriptures*, to *allegorize* their Meaning, and then to pretend, that They are incapable of a *just and rational Explication*, according to *strict and scholastic Rules of Criticism*.<sup>b</sup> There is no End of the *Excursions* of Fancy, but what could the utmost *Stretch* of *Infidelity* avail? Nothing more, than to produce a few Passages of Scripture, and instead of applying Them

<sup>a</sup> Wisd. ix. 16.

<sup>b</sup> The Author of the *Grounds and Reasons*.

to the *Messiah*, agreeably to the Interpretation of *Antient Jews* as well as *Christians*, to assert boldly, though without Reason, that in their *primary Sense*, They had only a *single Reference* to other respective Persons. But It has been often prov'd to the Satisfaction of all impartial Enquirers after Truth, that even those Prophecies, upon which such a *Stress* is lay'd, are justly applicable to *Christ*, and *congenial* to His Character above all others, and though the *Objector* endeavours to entangle his Reader in *Thorns* and *Briars*, yet all his Arts of *Sophistry* have been detected, and expos'd in their proper *Light*. \*

But suppose, that the Sense and Meaning of a few Prophecies were *hard to be understood*, and so wrapp'd up in *Mystery*, that They have baffled the Pains of the most diligent and dispassionate Minds, does It follow from thence, that no Regard is to be pay'd to such, as are *clear and intelligible*? Is God oblig'd to adapt the *sacred Dialect* to the capricious Humours of Men? What though some particular Truths are couch'd in *Parables*? though

\* See the *Divine Legation* of *Moses*. Sec. 6. B. 6. The double Sense of Prophecy is finely illustrated, though in a few Pages, and prov'd to carry in it a *logical Propriety*, and to be a *rational Mode* of Information.



some are more faintly delineated by *Actions* or *Persons*, under *typical Representations*, and others lye conceal'd even *from the Eyes of Men and Angels?*

It is sufficient to observe, that the very *Genius* of Prophecy supposes, that different *Measures* of Light will be thrown upon different *Predictions*, which may often proceed from the *Nature* of the *Subject*, from the *Distance* of *Time*, the different *Idioms* of *Language*, the *Variety* of *Customs*, or from the particular *Direction* of *Divine Wisdom*. But *the Foundation of God standeth sure*; tho' *His Ways* are not as *our Ways*, nor *His Thoughts* as *our Thoughts*, yet *Heaven and Earth* shall, as soon *pass away*, as one *Tittle* of his *Word* shall fail. Even the *darkest* Parts of the *Prophetic Scheme* will be brought to *Light*, and accomplish'd by *Him*, who directs the several *Springs and Movements* in the *Universe*, and is alone able to controll *Events*, and to govern *Futurity*. There is one peculiar *Advantage*, which greatly opens the *Way*, and tends to the *Perspicuity* of the *Prophetic Writings*, and That is, the frequent *Use* and *Application* of *similar Figures* and *Emblems* by different *Prophets*, so that by comparing the *One* with the *Other*, *spiritual*

*Things with spiritual*, We have as it were a Key to the Explication of them.

We may farther add, that Some particular Truths may be cast into *Shade* for many wise Purposes and *Providential* Reasons. For if every One at first Sight could survey the whole Scheme in all its *Turnings and Windings*, and look through all the *Scenes* of Action, how often, without the *Interposition* of Miracles, might the Counsels of God be thwarted by the *Perverseness* of Man? The principal *Instruments* in this grand *Machinery* might endeavour to counteract It, and to retard the *Wheels* of Government by many Interruptions.

It certainly ought to content any serious Inquirer, that the great *Out-lines* are struck in the most deep and visible Characters, and though some particular Passages may seem to refer to *intermediate Events* unknown to Us, yet the *Ultimate End* appears without *Embarrassment*, in full and open View.

A Sense of these Things should put a Restraint upon the *Rashness* of Man. It should not discourage our Endeavours to trace the *Ways of Providence*, but should teach Us to direct our Searches after Truth with Modesty and Reverence, in a firm Persuasion, that *Blessed is He, that readeth, and They, that bear*

*bear the Word of Prophecy, and keep those Things, which are written therein.* <sup>a</sup>

Fourthly, Other Points of *Excellence* peculiar to the Scripture-Prophecies are their wonderful *Variety and Extent* together with their uniform *Consistence* and *Connection* with each other.

The *Oracular Responses* among the *Pagans* were usually confin'd within a narrow Compass of *Time* and *Place*. The *Causes* and the *Effects* were at no very distant Remove; a Knowledge of the One was as a Guide and Path to the Other, and as *Political Ends* requir'd, It was no difficult Matter to hit upon some lucky *Conjecture*, and to frame a *Prediction* conformable to Them. <sup>b</sup>

Indeed among the low superstitious *Vulgar*, the *Sacred College of Augurs* were held in profound Esteem, as *the Supreme Interpreters of the Will of Jove*, but It is well known, that *Marcellus* and the wisest *Romans* despis'd the Art, as mere *Chicanery* and *Imposture*. <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Rev. i. 3.

<sup>b</sup> It was a known Trick in the *Roman Senate* to put a stop to Business by a Pretence, that the *Auspices* were not favourable or not rightly taken, or to call in the Authority of the *Sibylline Books*, as in the Case of *Ptolemy*, that a King of *Ægypt* should not be sent Home with an Army.

<sup>c</sup> There was a warm Dispute between *Marcellus* and *Appius Claudius* concerning *Divination*. They publish'd Books on each Side

But the *Scripture-Prophecies* (as has been already hinted) admit of no *Limitations*. They not only contain the *Memoirs* of Things present, and the past *Modes* of civil and religious Institutions in different Nations of the World, but They set before Us, as it were in *Miniature*, a long Series of Facts to come, a vast and wonderful Variety of Things, which lay buried in the *Womb of Nature*, and were not to be brought to *Maturity*, till after the Revolution of many Ages; All in a regular Order, Some of Them already fullfill'd, Others hastening on towards their Completion, and Others, with a slower Pace, awaiting the final *Consummation* of all Things.

In the all-comprehensive Views of the Deity, there are no *Distinctions* of *short* and *long*, no particular *Restrictions* of *Time* or *Place*, *one Day with God is as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as one Day.*

What Room could there be for Collusion, where there were no *similar Traces of Connection*, no visible *Concatenation of Causes and Effects*? When the Events foretold were at so great a Distance, what could the utmost Ef-

Side of the Question. The Latter was call'd the *Pisidian* for his superstitious Attachment to the *Auspices* &c. See *Middleton's Life of Cicero*, Lib. 3. p. 348.

forts



forts of human Sagacity avail? The Means were greatly *disproportionate* to the End, beyond the Reach of all human Power and human Foresight.

We may farther observe, that the *Heathen Oracles* had generally a Reference only to one respective Circumstance, as what *Cræsus* was doing at such a critical *Juncture*,<sup>a</sup> whether Peace or War was most eligible, or what would be the Issue of such a particular Expedition.

Here was no continu'd *Chain* — no regular Succession of Events from Age to Age. The chief Subjects of Inquiry extended no farther than perhaps to one or two determinate Objects near at hand.

It must be allow'd, that Some of the Answers given, were very extraordinary, and surprising, but the Whole consider'd together, appears as a wild *romantick Scene*, without Order, Proportion, or reciprocal Dependence.

But the *Word of Prophecy* both in the old and new Testament is one uniform Scheme of divine Providence; *Known unto God are all his Ways from the Beginning*. The *Colourings* indeed are different, but the *Lineaments* and *Features* are the same; the whole makes up one compleat and finish'd Piece, and like the

<sup>a</sup> Vid. Herodotum. Clib. Lib. 1.

*Lights and Shades in a Picture*, one Part gives Strength and Beauty to the other.

It was carried on by Men of different *Ages* and *Countries*, of *Judah*, *Israel* and *Chaldæa*, and indeed of different *Callings* and *Occupations*, from the *King* to the poor *Fisherman*, from *Isaiab*, the Delight and Ornament of a *Court*, to *Amos* a common *Herdsmen* in *Tekoa*. Among Persons of such various Characters, Conditions and Interests, no *Combination*, nor *Political Contrivance* could be form'd. But yet We see an amazing *Analogy* in most of the Predictions of the Prophets. The whole *Thread* is of one *Texture*: The same *Rays* of the same *Sun of Righteousness* cast a Lustre over the whole, and like *Lines* pointing to one common *Centre*, They all unite in *Jesus*.

If the *new Testament* was not consistent with the *Old*, if the *Prophecies* of the One were subversive of Those of the Other, Both would fall to the Ground, or at least, (as Truth cannot consist in two Opposites) the One or the Other must be false. But what can be a stronger and more illustrious Evidence of the divine *Inspiration* of both, than those striking Marks of Resemblance, which are visible in Them, all harmoniously conspiring, with *uniform Direction* towards the same  
Head

*Head even Jesus Christ, in Whom all the Building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord.* This happy *Consistence* is visible in all the Prophets; They derive from, and reciprocally bestow both Light and Strength upon each other.

Thus if We compare the Predictions of *Daniel*, *Saint Paul*,<sup>a</sup> and the *Revelation of St. John*, though in that great Variety, the *Figures* and *Images* are often different, yet the Scope and Design of them so nearly *coincide*, that They are all but several Parts of one great *System*, and the best Way of coming to a right Interpretation of Them, is to place them in one View together, and to observe, from a *Parity of Circumstances*, how strongly They confirm and illustrate each other.

By this *Contra-position* of one Prophecy against another, what a just *Arrangement* of Parts, what a regular and divine *Harmony* appears through an immense Space of Time? The *first Seeds* and Rudiments, like a grain of *Mustard*, are small in their Beginning, but they gradually unfold and expand themselves, and when grown to their full *Maturity* and *Perfection*, They extend their *Branches* far and

<sup>a</sup> See *Chandler*. V. 2. Ch. 2. Sec. 3. p. 287.

*wide, and yield their Fruit for the healing of the Nations.*

A Plan so noble, so beautiful, and regular in all its Parts could be form'd by no Wisdom but that, which reaches from one End to the other mightily, and sweetly doth order all Things. \*

*Fifthly*, The last peculiar Excellence of the Scripture-Prophecies, which I shall mention, is the growing Accomplishment of Them, and the Hopes, Comforts and other Advantages deriv'd from thence in all Ages of the Church.

Time is the best Criterion of the Truth or Falshood of Prophecy: If the Event does not correspond with the Prediction, this is a certain Indication of Imposture; It cannot come from a God of Truth, but must be the Result of a Lying Spirit of Divination: This was a Test, which often tore up the very Roots of Pagan Oracles. It was this, that caus'd the Evangelical Prophet to give that bold and spirited Challenge to the Idols of the Heathens. Produce your Cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong Reasons, says the King of Jacob; Let Them bring them forth, and shew us, what shall happen—shew the Things, that are to come hereafter, that We may know, that Ye are

\* Wisd. viii. 1.



*Gods — Behold, Ye are of nothing, and your Work of nought; an Abomination is He, that chooseth You.<sup>a</sup>*

But on the contrary, when the secret *Mysteries of Providence* are unveil'd; when a long Series of future, and very distant Events are expressly foretold, and circumstantially come to pass in a regular Succession, what can be a more convincing and *Illustrious Testimony* of the *Spirit of God*? especially, when consider'd, that the Prophets were Men of the most distinguish'd *Piety*, that They deliver'd their *Oracles* in the *sacred Name of God*, and were so far from having any *secular Interest* in View, that They renounc'd all for the *glowing Hopes* of the future *Kingdom of the Messiah*.

The *Accomplishment of Prophecy* closes the whole Scene. This is the last *Seal of the Spirit*. And it affords an *irresistible Evidence* of reveal'd Religion, which daily *accumulates and gathers Strength*. In this respect, says a learned Writer, as the *World groweth older, it groweth wiser. Time, that detracts Something from the Evidence of other Writers, is still adding Something to the Credit and Authority of the Prophets.*<sup>b</sup> The *Unity, Harmony and Pro-*

<sup>a</sup> *Isai. xli. 21, 22, 23.*

<sup>b</sup> The late Bishop of *London* in his *Discourses on Prophecy*.

*priety* of the divine Scheme clears up more and more, and *brightens* in its Progress.

In every Age of the World, the *sure Word* of Prophecy had its Use. The Sacred *Image* of God was *stamp'd* upon It in such strong and indelible Characters, that It was ever beheld with Awe and Reverence, as a standing *Monument* of divine Providencce: It was the great *Preservative* of the Faith and Religion of the *old World*: It fix'd and preserv'd the Knowledge of *Jehovah*, the *God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, among the *Patriarchs*, and was the great Pillar and Support of that *Virtue and Piety*, that *Patience and Perseverance*, that *Courage and Magnanimity*, which so eminently adorn'd those *antient Worthies*, and are particularly recorded in the 11 *Ch. of the Ep. to the Heb.*

It was the *Light* of Prophecy, that chac'd away the thick Mists of *Idolatry and Superstition*. The blessed Promises, though *seen a-far off*, were comfortable Assurances, that the *God of Israel* was above *all the Gods of the Nations*, and that His *Kingdom endureth from everlasting to everlasting*.

With Regard to the *Jews*, when They revolted from the Law, and were corrupted in their *Abominations*, with what Ardor and Vehemence

hemence did the Prophets *retort* upon Them? With what *Thunder of Eloquence* did They denounce the future Judgments from Heaven? How did They cry aloud, spare not, and lift up their Voices, like a Trumpet? The Arrows of the Almighty flew abroad, and all Nature 'was represented as trembling under the convulsive Pangs of approaching Death.

The *Figures* are inimitably bold, but not too strong to express the *Terrors* of an offended God. There is a true *Pathos* in all their Descriptions: Every Emotion of the Soul is touch'd with the nicest *Delicacy*. Their *Digressions*, tho' sudden, are yet natural, and their *Repetitions* are not vain and useless *Tautology*, but give a wonderful *Force and Energy* to their thoughts: There are indeed some *Breaks and Interruptions* in the Prophetic *Dialect*, which, if not strictly regular, are by no means *confus'd*, not, like the *Leaves of the Sibyls*,<sup>a</sup> scatter'd and *disorder'd*, but the very *Chasms* are fill'd up with useful Instructions, such as discover the noblest *Sallies* of Imagination, as well as the genuine Dictates of the *true Spirit of God*. Upon every Subject, there

<sup>a</sup> ——— Folliis tantum ne carmina manda,

Ne turbata volent rapidis Ludibria Ventis.

Virgil. Lib. 6. v. 74.

is a peculiar *Sublimity* of *Sentiment*, as well as *Expression* — and particularly, their Songs of *Praise* and *Thanksgiving* are noble and elevated beyond the utmost Efforts of human Composition, like *the sharp Sword* mention'd by *Solomon*, *They touch the Heaven, and stand upon Earth.*<sup>a</sup>

In what a different Light do the *lying Vanities* of the *Heathens* shew themselves? In what low and insipid Strains were their *Oracular Responses* given, whether in *Prose* or *Doggerel Verse*? Are *Caves* and *Grotto's* the proper Centre of Inspiration? <sup>b</sup> Are the *Artificial Motions* of *lifeless Images*, the *Nods* of *Jupiter Ammon*, or the wild *enthusiastick Rage* of a *fictionitious Priestess*, under a religious *Phrenzy*, *tearing her Hair*, *swelling and foaming at the Mouth*,<sup>c</sup> and *cutting her Flesh*, Are these Marks of a *divine Spirit*? What certainty could be drawn from *Sacrifices*, *Lots*, *Charms* and *Incantations*? What reasonable Deduc-

<sup>a</sup> Wisd. xviii. 16.

<sup>b</sup> See *Cotta's* Question in *Cicero* to the Collector's of *Apollo's* Offering. *If He were a God, why did He shrowd Himself in the Bowels of the Earth?*

<sup>c</sup> ————— *Ea fræna furenti*

*Concutit, et stimulos sub pectore vertit Apollo.*

*Ut primum cessit Furor, et rabida Ora quierunt.*

*Virg. Æn. 6. 102.*



tions could be made from *the Flight of Birds, the Entrails of Beasts, the ominous Appearances of the Heavens, from Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes?*

One would imagine, that Men, who built their Hopes on such *visionary Things*, believ'd, as *Cicero* observes, that the *Loss of common Sense* was the only *Inlet to divine Impressions*.<sup>a</sup>

But the Scripture-Prophecies were deliver'd openly and ingenuously, without reserve or disguise, without fanatic Rants, affected Gestures, or violent Contortions. The *Spirits of the Prophets*, says *St. Paul*, were *subject to the Prophets*: They were under due and rational Restraints: The natural Powers of the Mind cooperated with the divine and supernatural Gifts of the Spirit, tho' *vehement*, yet not *enthusiastic*, tho' animated with *Zeal*, yet sweeten'd with *Charity*.

The most gracious Promises, the most tremendous Threats, the most pious Exhortations, and the divinest Precepts of Truth and Righteousness are so happily blended and in-

<sup>a</sup> Quasi verò quidquam sit tam valdè, quàm nihil sapere, vulgare; or in another passage, *Quid habet Auctoritatis Furor Iste, quem Divinum vocatis, ut quæ sapiens non videt, ea videat Insanus, et Is, qui humanos sensus amiserit, divinos assecutus sit?* De Divinat. lib. 2.

terwoven with their Predictions, that the *Manner* as well as the *Matter* is wonderful and excellent; and consider'd jointly together, They can be no other, than the infallible *Oracles* of God Himself, whose Works are done in *Judgment from the Beginning, and from the Time He made them, He dispos'd the Parts thereof.*<sup>a</sup>

*These Things were written not only for the Edification of Those, who were cotemporary with the Prophets, but for our Admonition likewise, upon whom the Ends of the World are come, that through Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures, We might have Hope.*<sup>b</sup>

As to ourselves, We have reason to rejoyce, yea! and We do rejoyce. Many Prophets and righteous Men have desir'd to see the Things, which We see, and have not seen them, and to hear the Things, which We hear, and have not heard them.<sup>c</sup> It is our peculiar Happiness, upon Whom the *Latter Days* are come, to behold the *Glory of the Lord* in its Rise, and Progress still improving, and going unto *Perfection*.

The *Spirit speaketh more expresly to Us*. Many of the darkest *Mazes* of Prophecy are now unravell'd, and the gradual Completion

<sup>a</sup> Eccl. xvi. 26.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xv. 4.

<sup>c</sup> Matt. xiii. 17.

of Things past is an *Anchor of the Soul*, both *sure and stedfast*: It confirms our *Hopes*, dissipates our *Fears*, and fills us with a certain Assurance, that the Things not yet come to pass, will in due Season be fulfill'd: For a standing Memorial of the Truth of Prophecy, We need go no farther than to the present State of the *Jews*; We see *them become an Astonishment, a Proverb and a by-word among all Nations*,\* without any civil or religious Establishment, dispers'd as *Strangers and Sojourners* over the *whole Earth*. We behold Them even *Face to Face*, before our Doors, with every Mark of Distinction according to the Prophets, scatter'd abroad, as the *Dust*, but still subsisting, and providentially *preserv'd*, as bearing a signal Testimony, even against their Wills, to the *Religion of Jesus*.

And especially, the *Romish Church* affords Us a most striking and convincing Pledge, that *God is true*, though all *Men are Liars*. View the boasted *Hierarchy* of that Church, its *Idolatry* and *Superstition*, its *Lies* and *Frauds*, its pretended *Visions* and *Miracles*, its *Lording over the Heritage of God*. How minutely and emphatically were these Things describ'd by the Prophets? *Is it* possible to conceive a

a Deut. xxviii. 37.

greater *Likeness*? Even the *Time*, when these *Innovations* should infest the *Church*, as well as the *Place*, where these *Corruptions* and *Abominations* should prevail, are pointed out in the clearest *Light*, and in every respective *Circumstance*.

The true and genuine Character of the *Pope* Himself, under the *Title* of *the little Horn* by *Daniel*, of *Anti-christ* and *the Man of Sin* by *St. Paul*, is drawn with such Marks of *Affinity*, and such a surprising *Force of Expression*, that no modern *Historian* could present Him to Us with more *Precision* and *Exactness*.

Thus the *Word of Prophecy* is as a *Light* shining in a dark *Place*; and It shineth more and more until the perfect *Day*, until that solemn *Day*, when *Human Nature* will be restor'd to its original *Purity* and *Perfection*, when according to the solemn *Predictions* of the *Prophets*, the *Earth* shall be filled with the *Knowledge of the Lord*, as the *Waters* cover the *Sea*, the *Heathens* shall be converted, the *Kingdom of Israel* restor'd, and universal *Love* and *Harmony* abound, *Peace* shall extend herself, like a *River*, and the *Glory of the Gentiles*, like a flowing *Stream*.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Isai. lxi. 12.*

When



When the *Church of Christ* shall be adorn'd with every Kind of *Excellence*, with inward and outward Splendor, *without Spot, or Wrinkle, or any such Thing*. Truth, like a tender Plant, shall *spring out of the Earth*, in all its *Majestick Plainness*, and *Righteousness* shall look down from Heaven with the divine *Light* of its *Countenance*. In a Word, as St. *John* describes this great Period, the *Mystery* shall be *finish'd*—*Satan* shall be bound, and the *Kingdoms of this World* shall become the *Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*.<sup>a</sup>

Such are the blessed *Earnests* of the *Spirit of God*. These noble and glorious Prospects carry Us still farther, not only to contemplate the *Unity*, the *Increase* and *Perseverance* of *Christ's visible Church*, but the final *Completion*, and *eternal Triumphs* of It in the *new Heavens* and *new Earth*, wherein dwelleth *Righteousness*.

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xi. 15.

F I N I S.

When the Church of Christ shall be shown  
 with every kind of splendour, with inward  
 and outward splendour, without spot or stain,  
 and of every thing, it shall be a living  
 thing, shall bring out of the darkness all its  
 hidden things, and shining forth, shall be  
 adorned with the divine light of  
 its glory. In a Word, as St. John de-  
 scribes this great Period, the Mystery which  
 is hidden—2ndly, it is found, and the King-  
 dom of the World shall become the Kingdom  
 of our Lord and of his Christ.

Such is the blessed future of the Church  
 of God. These noble and glorious Prophecies  
 which I have just read, not only to comfort  
 the Church, but also to show the  
 Church of Christ, but the final Compe-  
 tion, and every thing of it in the new  
 Heaven and new Earth, shall be made  
 manifest.